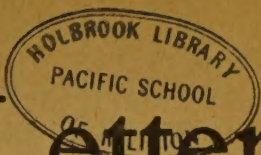


# The Christian News-Letter

Edited by  
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**D**EAR MEMBER,

I have no compunction about devoting a second letter to the subject of education, since on what is done in this field may depend our whole national future. The subject a fortnight ago was the report of the Conservative sub-committee, "A Plan for Youth." If I take this week the earlier report of the same committee on "Educational Aims,"<sup>1</sup> it is not because of any bias in favour of the source, but because, more than any other document of recent times, it compels us to go back to first principles and to ask what it is that we are really trying to do. It refuses, "without fresh and bold scrutiny," to be content with the merely automatic development of educational policy upon lines laid down in times very different from the present.

The report proposes, if I understand it rightly, four main aims of national education. I admire the vigour of mind which fastens on four things that supremely matter. With four we can find our bearings; when we are offered ten or forty, most of us become lost. By distinguishing essentials from what is less essential the report lifts the discussion to a new level; there may still be disagreement, but we are compelled to disagree about primary not about secondary or trivial things.

## A BOLDER VIEW OF NATIONAL PURPOSE

The first aim is the primary duty "to develop a national obligation in the individual citizen, to encourage in him an ardent understanding of the State's needs, and to render him capable of serving those needs." Future citizens must not only be trained to the use of arms in their country's defence, but given "a warmly felt understanding of their country's place and task in the world." They must be taught to be proud of their ancestors and their inheritance, and to accept the responsibilities of belonging to a great world-power.

What is here spoken of belongs to the natural rather than the specifically Christian sphere. But Christianity is not indifferent to what is natural. To ignore, as Christians have often done, such realities as sex, the nation or economic activities, is to allow Christianity to become divorced from life, and the suppressed forces sooner or later re-assert themselves with devastating consequences. The nation, with its long heritage from the past and its encompassing web of tradition and custom, is one of the most powerful formative influences in the life of the individual; and in periods of disintegration, like the present, this great moulding force cannot be left to be exercised unconsciously, but must be consciously directed to right ends. The fact that the natural virtue of patriotism may easily pass into the vices of imperialism and aggression is no reason for minimizing either the benefits or the responsibilities of nationhood, or for failing to relate them to the Christian purpose.

To teach the truth about our own nation is to teach its place in a community of nations, each possessing its own individuality and worth and rights. Any statement of complete educational aims would have to contain much that is not said in this report about the cultivation of international understanding and sympathies. But there is here no necessary conflict. A true internationalism is not the antithesis, but the fulfilment of a true nationalism.

<sup>1</sup> Central Committee on Post-War Reconstruction. 24 Old Queen Street, Westminster, S.W. 1. 6d.



The report itself supplies the corrective to any false collectivism by its strong insistence that it is the individual who must be regarded as the recreator of society, because "there is something in him which does *not* belong to one particular moment of time"; and that education must never monopolize the pupil's whole life, but that the more highly organized it becomes, the more scrupulously it must respect individual privacy.

### THE RELIGIOUS FACTOR

Nearly half the report is devoted to the religious factor in education. The membership of the committee represented many different religious attitudes and they rightly claim that their complete agreement in what they say on this subject is a fact deserving serious attention. In this profound treatment of the most momentous of all issues we are in a wholly other world from the superficial view often expressed in letters to the press, or in a recent resolution of the workers' conference of the Primrose League, that we need more religious education as a means of preventing juvenile crime.

Nor does the report give any ground for the charge that it offers a blend of nationalism and religion characteristic of Fascism. The authors are quite clear that the religious beliefs that feed the spiritual life of its citizens are something "which the State itself is powerless either to originate or to modify," and that this "ultimate religious field lies beyond the State's jurisdiction." They recognize explicitly that religious influence "has always been grounded in the individual citizen's own sense of obedience to a divine society, transcending but by no means unrelated to the earthly society to which he belongs by birth." Taken seriously, as the authors plainly intend it to be, this is not Fascism but the complete antithesis of Fascism.

But the State, as the guardian and guide of temporal affairs, has from its own point of view a proper concern with the presence of religion among its citizens; both because religion is essential to a true and full human life and ought, therefore, to be deliberately encouraged and fostered for its own sake, and also because it provides men with the emotional basis necessary for common action and is thus a basic and vital element in the national life.

"Emotional awareness by the individual of a purpose at once transcending and governing not only his own life but the whole contemporary and terrestrial scene—this is an essential condition of all social excellence and the general character of all active religious belief."

There follows an illuminating discussion of the practical means of giving effect to this principle, and an analysis of the present state of religion in this country which is the most discerning that I have yet met.

### NATIONAL CHARACTER AND DISCIPLINE

It is one of the most valuable contributions of the report that it sharply differentiates the moral discipline of religion from the secular moral training which is proper to the State, and refuses to allow either to be subsumed in the other. The distinction is almost always lost sight of in discussions of religious education. But Christianity has never claimed to undertake the whole task of moral training. It addresses its message to those whose character has already been largely shaped by tradition, custom and work. Where these character-forming forces have broken down, it is not for the Church to take on itself the whole task of rebuilding civilization; society must shoulder its own burdens, though a living faith and a Gospel of redemption may be the inspiration that gives birth to a new civilization.

In the view of the authors of the report the greatest and most urgent of all the immediate educational problems with which the nation is confronted is that of restoring and recreating civic morale. They regard as a grave danger the tendency throughout the nation to make individual happiness, and material comfort and enjoyment the chief ends of life, and for this the moneyed classes must in their view bear special blame as having set an example that has infected the entire social body. The courage and candour with which the report faces the slackening of moral fibre in the nation brings a note of greatly needed realism into the discussion of the educational future.



## LEADERSHIP

The fourth proposed aim of national education is the detecting and fostering of exceptional qualities of mind and character at all educable ages. The sub-committee are again to be congratulated on their courage in refusing to dodge this issue. People often seem to be afraid of affirming the need for training for leadership, lest it should appear undemocratic. But the report is doubtless right in holding that the desire of the great majority of ordinary people is that the nation should command an adequate supply of first-rate talent and first-rate leadership. It would at any rate appear to be certain that it is on the achievement of this last aim that the successful carrying out of the whole educational purpose in the long run depends. Where there are no seers, no pioneers, no initiators, the nation must sink slowly into stagnation and death.

What people naturally and rightly fear is lest the privileges may be given to the wrong persons. Extraordinary opportunity ought to be the consequence of extraordinary capacity ; and in the narrower, as well as in the more general, field there must be real equality (which need not mean uniformity) of educational opportunity, if a policy which is essential for the nation's survival is to meet with general acceptance.

## THE PERSON IN COMMUNITY

So far there can be warm agreement, though much must necessarily depend on how the aims are interpreted in detail. But the statement needs to be supplemented at three vital points before it can be regarded as an adequate philosophy of national education.

First, when the question is formulated, as in the report, as one of the relation of the individual to the State or the nation or society, we are headed either for totalitarianism or for anarchy. The crucial middle-term, which ought to occupy the centre of the stage, is entirely missing.

The individual in isolation set over against the nation or the State is a myth. The reality is the human person in living relations with other persons, and existing as a person only in and through those relations. Remove that context of direct demand and response between persons, of mutual obligation and responsibility, and the individual becomes merely a member of a mass, an undifferentiated mass-man, the inevitable prey of those who desire and know how to exploit him. It is a source of the greatest confusion that the term society is almost universally used to cover two things that are not only quite distinct but often in contradiction with one another. The experience of human fellowship and mutual obligation which comes from direct relations with other persons is something entirely different from the impersonal forces and rigid institutions of the Great Society ; and while the communication of an understanding of the latter is part of the task of education, it is the former that is vital to the growth of men and women who are fully persons.

The ignoring of this middle-term is all the more serious because the effect of the break-up of smaller groupings by modern large-scale organization is to replace genuine community life by a mass society in which the individual feels himself entirely lost and is unable to develop a true personal life. The most urgent task of education is to recreate and strengthen the weakened bonds of fellowship and mutual obligation. One opportunity is provided in the community life of the school. Beyond this lies the task of fostering the smaller groupings and more personal forms of association (pre-eminent among which is the family) in the larger world outside, and of bringing their influence within the scope of deliberate educational purpose. Many of you will recall the striking Supplement by Mr. G. D. H. Cole (C. N. L. No. 90), in which he showed that it is only by acting together in the control of small affairs that men can learn the meaning of responsibility. Burke had the same thing in mind when he declared that private honour was the great foundation of public trust, and that friendship was no mean step towards patriotism.



## THE LIMITS OF THE STATE

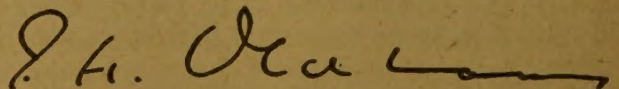
Secondly, there is need of a clearer and fuller definition of the functions of the State than we find in this report. It need not be assumed that what its authors intend gives ground for fundamental disagreement, but the issues involved are the most profound of any in the political sphere and further definition is plainly required. The identification of the State with the whole life of the community is the essence of Fascism. The report recognizes most significantly a sphere of religion beyond the jurisdiction of the State. But art, science, literature, the whole realm of personal life, and consequently all that is most important in education, have their own independent spheres, which must be kept free from the shackles of State control, even though it is the responsibility and duty of the State to provide the conditions for their exercise. A considered doctrine of the functions and limits of the State is one of our most urgent needs.

## TWO NATIONS OR ONE ?

Thirdly, it is a grave omission in the report that it leaves out of the picture the profound educational cleavage in this country between the privileged and the unprivileged. Refreshingly realistic in most of its thinking it evades this fundamental reality. It goes a long way towards providing the "bold and constructive policy" which it desiderates; what it fails to make clear is that the conditions to which its policy would be relevant do not as yet exist. It is quite unrealistic to urge the inculcation of loyalty, unless the nation deserves that loyalty by ensuring for all its members an adequate preparation for a satisfying life. It is not enough to recognize in passing that, if the State trains its young people for a job, it must make sure that the job is there, or that the nation must resolve that, "at whatever cost, mass-unemployment shall never again sap the vigour of the people." It is a question of the structure, balance and proportion of the whole report. What is needed is a section, as full and as powerfully argued as the others, insisting, as the Lewis Report did a quarter of a century ago, that the conception of the juvenile as a young wage-earner must be replaced by the conception of him as primarily the workman and the citizen in training. Without this presupposition, understood and accepted in all its implications, the report is a splendid superstructure lacking a solid foundation. Let the foundation be completed, and we might then have the plan of a building to which the whole nation could unitedly and hopefully set its hand.

The report itself attributes the immense generation of mental and spiritual energy in Russia to "the unaccustomed sense of belonging to a country which belongs to each and all." Is not that something to covet equally for ourselves? The future of Britain may well depend on whether we face that future as a single and united or as a divided people. And it may be that in the field of education that crucial question will find its answer.

Yours sincerely,



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